

SOME NEW TECHNIQUES IN COLLATING MANUSCRIPTS
AND EDITING TEXTS

I. Resurrecting the Ur-Text

Textual criticism aims, as is accepted, primarily, at the resurrection of the Ur-text, i.e., the text as had been composed by its author, at least one as near to it as possible on the basis of manuscripts of the work as are available today. The subject has established itself, both as an art and as a science, and, in India, which has an enormous wealth of manuscripts of a literature that has been continued to be produced during the last five thousand years, the science of critical editing has been applied towards resurrecting a large number of texts. Several conventions and practices have also evolved during the process. Naturally, a subject like this is amenable to the development of more and more effective methods towards saving time and labour and the achievement of better results. Some of the methodologies which the present writer has cultivated during the past two decades and more, on the background of current methods, are being set out below.

II. Selection of manuscripts

Normally texts are edited on the basis of several manuscripts. Cases of the availability of just a single manuscript are there, but they form but the exception.

One should not take up for editing a text which one does not understand. Simply because a work has been suggested to him or he comes upon a work which seems unique, he should not jump at editing it. One has to set about editing a text only when one has the intellectual and material equipment for it.

When the several manuscripts of a text have been identified, the best among them should be taken for primary copying. It is not desirable, for obvious reasons, to use a previous edition as the base for critically editing a text. The choice shall not rest on the rule of the thumb or on the first one that comes to hand. There shall be a preliminary examination of all the manuscripts, both of their external characteristics and their internal contents. When all the manuscripts cannot be had simultaneously, which is mostly the case, at least such details thereof, like their completeness, state of preservation, legibility, freedom from scribal errors and internal lacunae should be ascertained from the custodians of the respective manuscripts, or from descriptive catalogues, if the latter be available in print. A few passages extending to a few lines each, from here and there, should also be obtained for examination. On the basis of the material assembled, as above, and the examination of the passages obtained, that manuscript which seems to be the best from all the above-said points of view should be procured for copying. This copy shall be so prepared that it would form the draft, or even the final, press copy, towards which the methods suggested below could be made use of.

III. *Description of the Manuscripts*

Over and above the generally noticed items of physical description, like the name of the repository, the Ms. number, script, material, length, breadth, number of lines in a page, number of letters in a line and the number of folios, it is important to note the colophons, post-colophonic statements, name of the scribe and date of the writing, if available. It is equally important to record, within brackets, the different numbers under which the same manuscript had been designated in any earlier handlist,

simple catalogue or descriptive catalogue, so that possible confusion is avoided in case the same manuscript had been documented elsewhere under one or the other of these numbers. Such characteristics, such as purity or inaccuracies, well preserved or injured, full or broken, omitted or repeated folios, lacunae or blanks found have also to be noted, towards providing an idea of the degree of reliability of the manuscript.

IV. *Sigla for the manuscripts*

Generally manuscripts used for critical editions are identified by their editors by the initial letters of the places where the repositories of the manuscripts are located, e.g. P for Poona, C for Calcutta, and M for Madras; or the owners of the collections, e.g. W for Wilson, B for Burnell etc. More rarely, the material of the manuscript is used for the purpose, e.g. Pl. for a Palmleaf manuscript and Pr. for a Paper manuscript, or even the script, like for instance, Gr. for a Grantha manuscript and Mal. for a Malayalam manuscript. This type of sigla, given on the basis of external or extrinsic reasons, is intrinsically defective and lacks logic. Thus a manuscript from Poona, designated P, if copied anew and kept in Bombay, would become B. A manuscript will change its designation if it changes its owner or collection. A palmleaf manuscript will be designated Pr. just by its being copied on paper, and a Bengali manuscript will become Ng. for its being copied in Devanagari.

The better and more scientific way of designating manuscripts would be to call all intrinsically related groups of manuscripts, grouped by version, recension or descent, as A, B, C etc. and number of the individual manuscripts in each group as 1, 2, 3 etc., whatever be their repository, owner, place, script or material. Here, too, the earlier groups in descent shall have to be designated by the earlier letters of the alphabet. Then, again, the order of the numbers 1, 2, 3 etc. should depend upon the completeness, accuracy, extent and date of the individual manuscripts. The above-said designation of the manuscripts would automatically

result in a logical arrangement of the manuscripts in matters like authenticity, chronology and importance.

V. *The First copy the Press copy*

It is preferable that the editor himself prepares a good transcript from the best manuscript in such a way that that copy itself could form the ultimate press copy, or at least the final draft.

The normal practice is to copy manuscripts through the entire page of the transcript, often on both sides of the paper. There is also the practice of keeping the sheets length-wise, write in the central portion and leave margins on both sides for recording variants. Collation sheets having all the four quarters of a verse in one line has been in practice for the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, and for the *Rāmāyaṇa* by the Oriental Institute, Baroda. The late P. C. Divanji had suggested that, instead of taking a whole verse as a unit, an improved way would be to treat a quarter of a verse as a unit. However, the method suggested below and used by the present writer with great benefit, offers distinct advantages.

Thus, the transcript should be prepared neatly and legibly on the lefthand, i.e. even, pages, of a stitched notebook, preferably of foolscap size. The writing should cover only two-thirds of the page, leaving the bottom one-third for eventual addition of foot-notes. The lines of the transcript should have enough space between them for any correction or small insertions between the lines, if needed, later.

Provision should be made in the transcript as would be required in the final press copy, such as for spacing, paragraphing, topic headings, numbering of verses, bracketted space for references and quotations, quotation marks, etc. If the work being edited comprises a text and its commentary, the textual verses should be copied in red ink or in bold script as in printed books and the passages introducing the commentary of the verses, should be transcribed above the verses, again, as in printed books.

VI. Collation

The general practice adopted in collating manuscripts is to record the variants separately for each manuscript, with reference to the page and line numbers of the first transcript. This results in taking up much time and involving labour in comparing the variants recorded in several sheets of paper spread out before him while editing the text. Quite often, some variants are even missed to be duly noticed. Some recommend the recording of variants in the space between the lines of the transcript itself above the relevant passages, using a different ink for a different manuscript, for in this case, there would not be space enough to indicate the sigla of the respective manuscripts also in between the lines. Yet others record the variants in the margins left on the two sides of the transcript. In the method adopted by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and the Oriental Institute, the text in every manuscript is copied in its entirety, one verse, in its four quarters; in one line, per sheet, so that the same verse from all the manuscripts come together one below the other in the same sheet. P. C. Divanji's method, mentioned above, will have one quarter in one line and only those letters which differ from the master quarter at the top would be recorded. All these methods involve intrinsic defects, which could be avoided, with the additional advantage of saving time and labour and gaining accuracy and fullness by an easy method suggested below.

Each manuscript of group A, B, C etc. should be collated in that order, if possible, and the variants should be recorded on the righthand pages facing the lefthand pages on which the text has been transcribed in the manner indicated above. The variants should be noted against the same lines in which they occur in the transcript. There again, if a variant occurs for a word in the beginning of a line, the variant should be recorded also in the beginning of the line in the righthand page, if in the middle, in the middle of the line opposite, and if towards the end, towards the end in the opposite on the righthand page.

When the same variant is repeated in a second or third manuscript, the variant need not be copied repeatedly; it would

be enough to add the sigla of the manuscript against the variant recorded already from a manuscript collated earlier.

If there occurs any extra passage or long addition as a variant in any manuscript, it should be copied in the bottom one-third of the righthand page which would normally remain blank, after making an indication in the line above where the addition should normally have been copied.

VII. *Critical editing*

By working in the manner indicated above, there would be, before one, a print-like transcript of the best manuscript on the lefthand page and all the variant readings (including the indication of omissions, additions and extra passages, if any), arranged on the righthand side, each against the line in which it occurs, recorded group-wise and manuscript-wise. In this set-up, it is most easy to evaluate the variants and decide upon the correct reading. If ever any variant reading is adjudged to be better, that can be written in its proper place in the transcript and the transcript-reading transferred with its sigla to the righthand page. If there is any variant which is only a scribal error or otherwise not worthy of final recording, that variant should be marked with a cross and all the real variants marked with tick marks. If there be an emendation, that might be put within brackets in the transcript and all the variants including the original transcript reading relegated to the footnotes. If there be an editorial addition, that might be added within in square brackets.

VIII. *The Press copy*

The real variants shall, now, be written down as footnotes, serially numbered, in the blank one-third space provided at the bottom of the transcript, the footnote numbers being superscribed over the relevant words in the transcript above. In numbering the footnotes, it would be advantageous to relate them to the text, say, a verse or a verse and its commentary or a numbered

paragraph in a prose text, and not to the pages of the transcript, so that the numbers would be intrinsically related to the text and it would, therefore, be not necessary to change footnote numbers when the text is printed from the press copy.

When all the variants have been duly noted as footnotes, as directed above, such other culturing of the transcript should be attended to as would make the transcript the final press copy. This would include the documentation for the references and citations in the blanks provided within brackets, numbering of the textual verses and the commentaries thereof, as might be needed, underlining the textual words in the commentary, addition of single inverted commas to words to be stressed and double inverted commas to citations other than full verses printed in separate lines with space above and below.

It might be seen that the preparation of a press copy by the method suggested above has distinct advantages. First, there is considerable saving of time and labour in that a second copying of the text to form a press copy, with its attendant errors creeping in, is eliminated. Secondly, much labour is saved also in not having to write down repeatedly identical variants noted in different collation sheets and later correlating them. Thirdly, and most important than all, all the variants of a passage automatically find themselves grouped and ranged opposite the relevant textual passages « permanently », to be used, not only when the editing is being done, but also to be available for checking, verification and even reconsideration at a later stage, if ever such a reconsideration is found necessary at any time, even for a new or revised edition.

IX. Qualities of a good editor

Finally, a word on the qualifications and equipment of an editor. While a good knowledge of the subject dealt with in the work is essential, the ability to probe the mind of the original author, not only in the matter of ideas and intentions, but even in his wording and diction would stand in good stead of an editor, towards arriving at the Ur-text of the work he is editing,

especially in choosing a reading from amongst several variants, or supplying a missing syllable. Equally important is a full knowledge of the technical terms of the subject, which would enable him, among other things, to read correctly scribal scribblings or wrong writing of technical words, which are most apt to be written erratically in manuscripts, on account of their being uncommon. He should have the sagacity to decipher bad writing and even to figure out a missing syllable. Patience, integrity and modesty characterize a good editor. Besides, he should also have the flair for his work and sufficient intuitive power to solve textual tangles. Again, what is a must, is a logical and rational approach, for it is said, « To err is human », but a critical editor shall not take umbrage under this excuse.